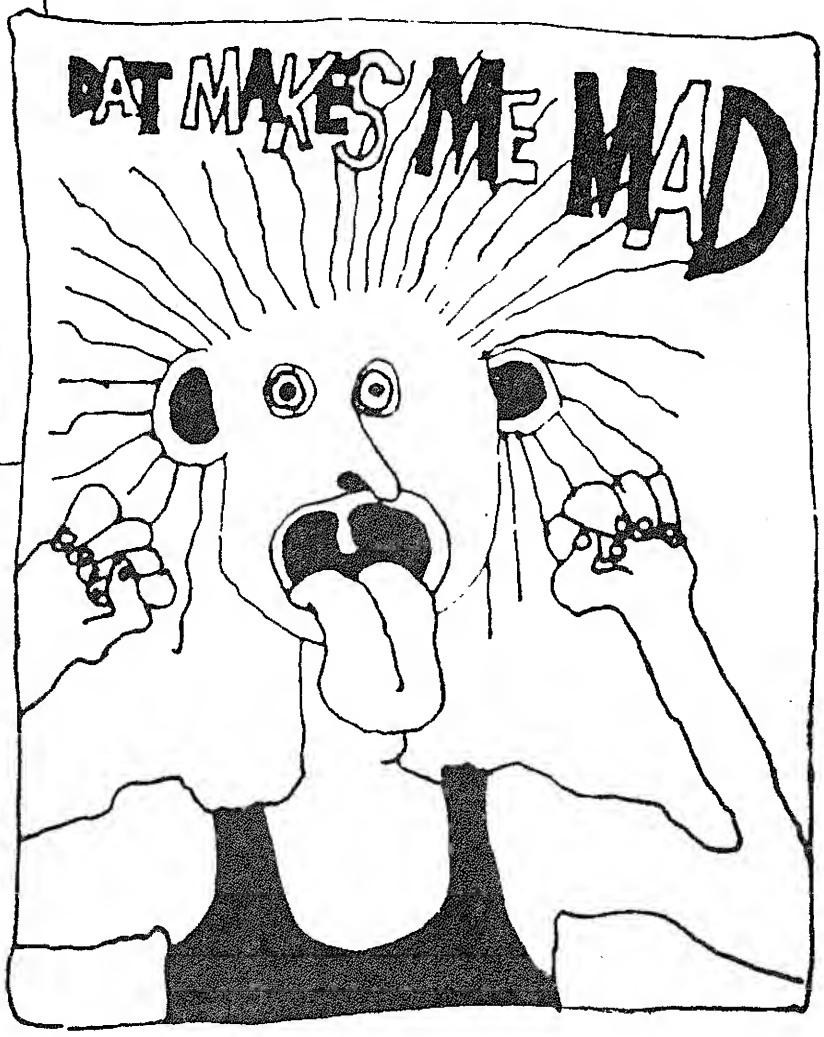
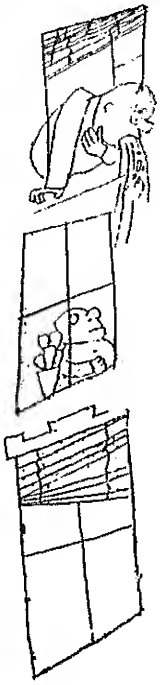
Subversion

Number 23 Free! (donations welcome)

News, letters, debates, articles and reviews about...

Uniting Our Class, Extending Our Struggles





Capitalism makes us puke!

Find out why starting on p14!

Introduction to Subversion 23

Most of this issue of **Subversion** is taken up with articles and correspondence around the theme of class composition and the relationship between different sections of the working class in the course of struggle. Some of the earlier background to this can be found in issues no. 21 and 22 (copies still available) and in sections of **The Second Best of Subversion.**

We think this is an important theme for discussion amongst revolutionaries which needs to be based, whenever possible, on experience and knowledge gained in the actual practice of the class struggle (and not just in Britain!). Because everyone's experience is inevitably partial, attempts at generalisation are equally inevitably limited in value. By bringing these together in debate and testing them in practice we hope to learn as we go along!

Articles and correspondence have been selected with this approach in mind (even when they do occasionally contain unnecessary patronising remarks or name-calling!). We should stress again that signed articles do not necessarily represent the views of Subversion. Also, whilst our group does discuss and seek agreement on unsigned articles it does not follow that every member agrees with every comment in such articles.

We have decided not to publish in this issue further contributions we have received on the subject of Green Anarchism/Communism, but if you are interested in this continuing debate we can photocopy the further correspondence for you (send 50p in postage stamps).

What We Stand For

We meet regularly for political discussion and to organise our activities. The following is a brief description of our basic political principles:

We are against all forms of capitalism; private, state and self-managed.

We are for communism, which is a classless society in which all goods are distributed according to needs and desires.

We are actively opposed to all ideologies which divide the working class, such as religion, sexism and racism.

We are against all expressions of nationalism, including "national liberation" movements such as the IRA.

The working class (wage labourers, the unemployed, housewives, etc.) is the revolutionary class; only its struggle can liberate humanity from scarcity, war and economic crisis.

Trade unions are part of the capitalist system, selling our labour power to the bosses and sabotaging our struggles. We support independent working class struggle, in all areas of life under capitalism, outside the control of the trade unions and all political parties.

We totally oppose all capitalist parties, including the Labour Party and other organisations of the capitalist left. We are against participation in fronts with these organisations.

We are against participation in parliamentary elections; we are for the smashing of the capitalist state by the working class and the establishmentof organisations of working class power.

We are against sectarianism, and support principled co-operation among revolutionaries.

We exist to actively participate in escalating the class war towards communism.

Want to get in involved in Subversion?

There are many ways you could get involved in Subversion. For instance:

☐ Correspond with us on issues raised in our bulletin
☐ Write articles for inclusion in our bulletin (let us know in advance an outline of what you're thinking of writing)
☐ Take extra copies of the Subversion bulletin to distribute to friends or at local meetings/events
☐ Copy and distribute relevant articles more widely
☐ Contribute financially on a regular basis

Ideally we would like to see Subversion grow and become more effective by joining up with other local active groups following a period of joint discussion and activity. But we recognise that at the present time many individual revolutionaries are fairly isolated. If you're in this situation and you already do most or all of the above list it would be a logical step to consider joining our group. If you live in or within easy travelling distance of Greater Manchester we would urge you to do this. If you live further away the practical benefits of joining would be less but we could still guarantee:

☐ Regular minutes of our meetings
☐ Access to material we receive
☐ Regular contact through letters/phone calls/email
☐ Draft articles for Subversion for comment

In this way you would have more influence on the direction and activity of the group.

Obviously if we had a large influx of individual members like this we would then all have to discuss new ways of organising that would more effectively involve everyone.

So - think about it!

Our Address is on page 19

Since issue 18 Subversion has included several articles on the fight against the Job Seekers Allowance, and the possibilities (if any) for joint action with dole office workers, including the article "Only Doing Your Job?" written by two comrades from Nottingham in Subversion 22. What follows is a reply to that article; a response by one of the Nottingham comrades; and a further contribution by two comrades of the Anarchist Communist Federation (ACF).

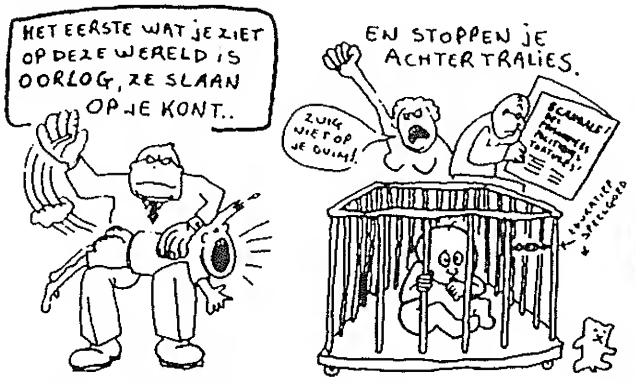
Against Pious Moral Liberalism!

A Reply to Two Comrades from Nottingham

During the great miners strike of 1984-85 many so-called anarchists, particularly those inclined towards animal liberation or 'lifestyle politics', refused to throw their weight behind the striking miners. After all, weren't all the miners sexist, didn't they all eat meat? etc. Such arguments resurfaced during the print workers strike at Wapping when, rather than seize an opportunity with the potential to turn the tide of class struggle back in our favour, such 'anarchists' chose to stand aloof from a strike by supposedly selfish and privileged workers who merely wanted to defend their own position doing dirty propaganda work for the bosses by printing a reactionary newspaper that attacked women, gays and lesbians etc. Since then such sanctimonious moralism has gone from strength to strength as we have experienced defeat after defeat in the class war. Of course, pious moral liberalism has always played an important part in British anarchism, but it has become ever more prevalent in recent years, even invading the pages of otherwise avowedly communist organs such as Subversion.

In its most virulent and arrogant form this pious liberal moralism has taken the form of primitivism. Primitivists like to present themselves as the ultimate radicals. Indeed, what can be more radical than to reject civilisation as such!? But for all their pious denunciations of civilisation and vision of new hunter gathering societies they have, short of mass genocide, no means for transforming the world. Their radicalism turns out to be merely a pose.

The true nature of primitivism was perhaps most clearly exposed by a leaflet circulated by the Primitivist Network entitled 'JSA: So What!?'. With the JSA, and the subsequent Workfare schemes such as Project Work and the proposed New Deal, it would seem clear that the state is in effect targeting the very material basis for many within the anarchist milieu. The class struggle is being brought home. But what was the response of Primitivists? To ignore the whole issue! For them we should not be dependent on the state, and anyway the unemployed need a good boot up the arse! If these arguments remind one of a right wing Tory, rest assured that the campaigns they suggest we should engage with instead of opposing the JSA and Project Work - e.g. against genetically modified food, the Asylum Act etc. - return them to the terrain of concerned liberals everywhere (1).



(1) When you're born the first thing you face is aggression - a slap on the bum (2) Then they stick you behind bars ("Stop sucking your thumb!")

In the previous issues of Subversion you have sought to respond to Primitivism, albeit on its own terms, by arguing for a Green Communism. However, in the last issue you carried another piece of pious moral liberalism which for some reason you did not see fit to answer. This piece was the article Only Doing Your Job? which we would like to take issue with here.

We gather that comrades in Nottingham have been actively involved in the fight against the JSA, Project Work etc., and have in the past made efforts to connect with dole workers which have either been ignored or even met with active resistance from local CPSA officials. Overcoming the divisions between different sections of the proletariat is of course a key problem in the class struggle. However we are forced to respond to the way our two Nottingham comrades have posed the issue in their article. Here we see that their apparent commitment to class analysis is completely betrayed by a bourgeois individualistic approach to the problem. It is an approach that inevitably leads them to a pious liberal moralism that is no better than that we find with the Primitivists. This approach is made clear with their opening remarks where they suggest that the question of solidarity with struggling dole workers "appears to refer to the freedom versus determinism debate in philosophy: how much is our behaviour authentically free and how much is it determined by social circumstances" (Only Doing Your Job?, Subversion 22) (2)

Of course, it could be argued that the question of free will versus determinism has always been a philosophical problem. But it is a question that is central to bourgeois philosophy. Under capitalism freedom of choice becomes a necessity. Everyone must be free to buy just as everyone must be free to sell. Indeed with ever increasing production of commodities we have an ever

expanding choice of what to buy (so long as we have the money of course). Not only this, with the rise of democracy, which goes hand in hand with the rise of capitalism, we are even free to choose our own rulers!

(3) Tyranny rules ("God's watching you!" "Hands above the blankets! Filthy beast!") (4) They make you eat shit ("Eat it all up!")

Yet at the same time the development of capitalism breaks society up into isolated individuals that have no control over the social world which they serve to create. Capitalists have to ruthlessly pursue greater profits or else they will soon cease to be capitalists, workers have to work harder and harder or else they will find themselves on the dole. At the same time whole industries and communities can be devastated through a mere change in the price of a commodity. In this light the action of human beings are determined by capital as an alien social force.

It is this contradiction that provides the material basis for the dilemma of bourgeois philosophy between free will and determinism. Of course, for our liberal bourgeois philosopher, who is both unwilling and unable to transform society from the comfort of his study, what is important is the individual's freedom of choice. While he may well recognise the shortcomings of capitalism he puts this down to people making the wrong moral choices. For the liberal bourgeois philosophers of the enlightenment it was simply a question of reason. If everyone acted in accordance with reason, if everyone only did to others what they wanted done to them, then everything would be OK. Indeed, since every 'man' was a rational being by definition then there were good hopes that this could be achieved.

Over the 200 years or so since the enlightenment, however, capitalism has in many respects become worse. The idea that if only we each made the right moral choice in our own enlightened self-interest then all would be well has worn a little thin. Many of the more militant modern day liberals have given up on the mass of humanity making the right moral choices. Indeed, in the case of some primitivists they have given up on the notion of reason altogether, seeing it as part of the problem. The only course for such modern day liberals is to keep their own consciences clear by making their own moral choices and denounce every one else for not following suit. All they can do is hope for some apocalypse to come and redeem the world.

The approach which dominates the article by the two Nottingham comrades is essentially no different from that of such modern day militant liberals. Of course they recognise that it is in the ultimate interests of the working class to overthrow capitalism and introduce communism. Yet for them it is simply a question of each individual proletarian choosing to pursue their class interests regardless of what situation they find themselves in. From this they can conclude that the working class is potential good while the capitalists are bad.

The problem then arises as to why the mass of working class individuals have not chosen to overthrow capitalism. It is clear to our friends from Nottingham that some workers have clearly made the wrong choice. Those choosing to be police officers, social workers, school teachers, journalists, dole workers etc. All are clearly working against the interests of the working class. But it is not just these workers. On closer inspection we can find, rather surprisingly, that nearly all workers are in some way working for capital and thus ultimately against the general interests of the working class! They have all made the wrong choice! Postal workers deliver bills and disconnection threats to working class households. Car workers produce cars which will be driven through working class districts killing working class children etc. The logical conclusion would seem to be the only proletarians who can be genuinely and unequivocally opposing capital are those that refuse work altogether!!! (3) We don't know if our two Nottingham comrades feel they are in such an 'uncompromised' position. But the idea that all proletarians should strive for such purity can only lead to such isolation that all that can be realistically hoped for is some kind of revolutionary apocalypse!!!

Generalising from their own negative experience of dole workers, and local CPSA hacks in particular, our Nottingham comrades have been led to disparage all the efforts by dole workers to resist the JSA. Against this one should recognise that, for all the bluster our Nottingham friends have provoked, it is action by dole workers which has had the most effect in disrupting the implementation of the JSA and mitigating its effects. With just the one day strike two years ago the dole workers managed to cause more disruption to the implementation of the JSA than the entire Groundswell movement has been able to do in three years. Of course, our two Nottingham comrades argue that this strike, and those taken by the DSS workers later in the year, were not directly against the JSA but were for taken for their own interests (4). But since when have we expected any workers to strike for purely altruistic reasons!

Our Nottingham friends complain that

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Pious Moral Liberalism

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dole workers don't stick their necks out when claimants are being threatened with dole cuts if they don't look hard enough for work. But it must be remembered that if a dole worker is sacked they too face losing their benefits for six months, and furthermore if they leak information, however trivial, they can be prosecuted under the Official Secrets Act! It is easy being political on the dole. You don't normally get your money cut or get disciplined for handing out leaflets or speaking at meetings; dole workers can.

Their own efforts to make links with local dole workers having failed our friends from Nottingham sought to parade their radicalism by advocating a national three strikes policy. We can appreciate why groups such as Edinburgh have adopted a such a policy, and why our Nottingham comrades found it attractive. Facing a hostile local trade union movement and a right wing branch of the CPSA, Edinburgh claimants were able to mount a relatively effective three strikes policy because they had built up strong links with local claimants through their unemployed centre (5). Of course if there had been a nation-wide mass movement of claimants, or if three strikes had the potential of mobilising such a movement, then a national three strikes policy might have made sense. But the fact is there isn't a mass movement of claimants. We can barely mobilise 100 people for a national demo out of two and half million claimants! Even so-called political claimants have refused to become involved in the fight against the JSA preferring to bury their heads in the sand. In such a situation a national three strikes policy would have been a disaster, alienating us from any number of potential allies. Perhaps fortunately most groups in Groundswell have proved too weak to implement any such policy even if they had wanted to!

For us class analysis is not about making moral judgements on the individual choices of groups of workers regardless of the circumstances. It is a question of assessing the possibility of transforming such circumstances and choices through collective action and solidarity. Of course this does not mean there is no place for an individual proletarian making a principled stand, particularly if this leads to an

(5) They stuff you into silly clothes

exemplary act which encourages collective action. But, unlike the liberal philosopher, we can not be content with individual choice, we need collective action to transform the world since the individual choices we all have are limited by the world we live in.

This does not mean we simply proclaim some form of ideal unity as much of the left does. Unity between individual proletarians and different sections of the proletariat has to be built through the recognition of immediate differences of interests and the attempt to reconcile them within the common struggle. Of course there are some workers whose very job requires them to internalise the interests of capital as much as any capitalist. The obvious example is the police. In all but the most exceptional circumstances we can not expect the police to come over to our side, and if they did they would soon have to cease to be police. For other workers, such as dole workers, the situation is far more complex.

Our friends from Nottingham rightly point out that the JSA involves a change in the role of front-line staff 'from one of administration to more of a policing role'. However they wrongly accept this as a fait accompli when it is still being contested. Moreover, such a characterisation of dole workers as police who force the unemployed to find work fails to recognise that, whether we like it or not, the majority of claimants want work if for no other reason than because they need the money. Part of the job for dole workers is to help people find work as well as to administer the payment of benefits (6). Of course many dole workers distinguish between good claimants who are looking for work and bad ones that are not. Some may even hate all claimants. But in our experience many recognise that there are not enough jobs to go around even if every one wanted one, and that most of those that are advertised pay shit wages that no one should be expected to work for.

Yet the balance of these attitudes depends on the balance of class forces within the office. If management is strong then each individual dole worker will only be able to either stick their neck out and get the sack or else keep their head down and adopt a more hostile attitude to claimants. If the workers are collectively strong however then they can resist the demands and targets set by management. This has clearly been proven in Brighton. For example, in Brighton, where the dole workers are organised and strong, there has been far fewer people sanctioned than in surrounding offices where the dole workers are less organised and weaker.

What is more, a part of this strength is a direct result of the solidarity we have built with the dole workers. We have supported their strikes because it has been in our interest, as well as that of the class as a whole, for the strikes to have maximum impact. We have boosted their picket lines and then leafleted other claimants afterwards explaining the reasons for the strike and countering management's attempts to encourage dole workers and claimants to see each other as the problem, thereby deflecting attention from our mutual class enemies. And we inform them of our actions and demonstrations and so forth so that they can come and support us, establishing real solidarity. (7)

In a period where we have seen defeat after defeat in the class war we can

understand the attractions of a pious moral liberalism in all its various guises. Yet such an approach only serves to perpetuate our present predicament and as such must be exposed and denounced (8). With the declining effectiveness of labourism there is now, for the first time in many decades, an opportunity to break down many of the sectional divisions within the working class. But such an opportunity will be lost if we follow the example of our friends from Nottingham!

Yours for proletarian solidarity (not sanctimonious piety),

B & B, c/o PO Box 2536, Rottingdean, East Sussex BN2 6LX

(1) The irony is that the whole basis of the Asylum Act's attack on refugees is the withdrawal of benefits - a basis from which we could make links of proletarian solidarity from our own situation by grasping the class significance of benefits rather than dismissing their defence as worthless reformism. Of course this criticism of reformism has a kernel of truth - the argument that the welfare state does not embody the final victory of the working class was essential whilst it served its primary purpose of containing working class revolt. But with the boot now on the other foot, i.e. with capital on the offensive, to refuse to engage with the struggles over benefits because they fall short of some ideal is like arguing we shouldn't stop capital from taking the bread from our mouths because what we really want is the whole bakery. The welfare state has become a hindrance to capital in the class war, which is why capital wants to restructure it. Even though it is a defective weapon in our hands we cannot allow ourselves to be disarmed when the only other thing apparent in our in our armoury at present is a white flag.

(2) Subversion readers who missed this article may cringe to read this quote, or may even think we have been unfair to our Nottingham comrades by picking out this piece of self-evidently bourgeois logic from an article expressing an otherwise sound grasp of dialectical thinking. On the contrary we could have chosen to highlight the devastatingly penetrative reasoning displayed by conclusions such as "Two wrongs don't make a right" or "If something is bad then it does not matter how much you get paid...It's still bad..." (Only Doing Your Job?, Subversion 22) but that would have been, ...erm, ...unjust? Unreasonable? Not quite cricket?

(3) But of course it could be argued that the unemployed function as an industrial reserve army for capital, the growth of which has coincided with a period of heavy defeats for the working class.

(4) As if the same argument could not be levelled at their 'Three Strikes' tactic!

(5) The Three Strikes policy was originally put forward by Edinburgh claimants in response to the 'fraud buster' campaign. It was a tactic designed to discourage certain individuals within the Employment Service from the over-zealous implementation of the existing benefit rules. Notwithstanding the particular circumstances Edinburgh claimants found themselves faced with, it was always a grossly inadequate response to the wholesale change in the benefit rules introduced through the JSA. But at least in Edinburgh there was a significant enough claimants organisation for such a tactic to amount to more than empty radical posturing.

(6) The particular experience of the claimant actively avoiding work should not be taken as the sole basis for assessing the class significance of the JSA. Any claimants groups who have successfully managed to completely close down a dole office for any significant period of time will have encountered the problem of unappreciative claimants wanting to gain access to the office to sign on, to sort out about missing girocheques, or to get a job. Unfortunately the lack of this sort of action in many parts of the country has allowed illusions about claimants to be retained and with them misconceptions about the functions of dole workers. Perhaps if those groups incapable of shutting down their local Job Centre(s) had spent a few hours outside them when striking dole workers did just that they might have realised that building opposition to the JSA would necessarily require broadening the issue beyond that of 'they want me to work and I don't want to'.

(7) Of course we recognise that such a relationship may not always be as easy to establish and maintain as we have found. There is always the potential problem when being involved in an umbrella 'Brighton Against The JSA'- or 'London Against The JSA'- type group of having to deal with leftist ideologues. Indeed, Subversion 22 also contained an 'Open Letter of Resignation from the Secretary of Wales Against the JSA' which vividly describes a situation in which the letter writer was forced to resign from the group because it was dominated by leftists seeking to subordinate direct action by claimants to the strategy of the CPSA. Lest anyone be under the impression that such a withdrawal has released an explosion of previously suppressed autonomous struggle by Welsh claimants the letter also makes it pretty clear that such a problem only became insurmountable in the first place because of the lack of any significant movement amongst claimants. It's hardly surprising that leftist activists will retain workerist illusions in the absence of any visible alternative force of organised opposition to JSA (nor that such workerism will be focused on dole workers when they are the only workers actively contesting JSA). Subsequent to leaving WAJSA the writer of this letter, and the seven or eight who quit with him, have been too unenthusiastic to establish any claimant - oriented alternative.

(8) Given Subversion's professed opposition, worthy even of a place in their hallowed 'Aims and Principles', to all ideologies which seek to divide the working class, one might reasonably have expected a scathing critique of the article by the two comrades from Nottingham. No doubt had a letter been submitted by a striking dole worker arguing that the pursuit of solidarity with the unemployed was pointless Subversion would have seen fit to condemn such divisiveness. Or are Subversion intending to redefine their aims and principles to accept divisive ideologies when they are espoused by those who feel they are oppressed by another section of the proletariat? Can we expect Subversion to provide sympathetic space for black nationalism, Irish republicanism or separatist feminism now that this precedent has been set?

The following are two independent replies to the foregoing Reply to Two Comrades from Nottingham. Both are written in a personal capacity and do not necessarily reflect the views of other members of Nottingham Campaign Against the Job Seekers Allowance (recently renamed Nottingham Claimants Action). The first, "Doling It Out", is by one of the Two Comrades, the second, "State Power and Class Solidarity", is by two members of the Anarchist Communist Federation in Nottingham.

Doling it Out

'A Reply to Two Comrades From Nottingham' purports to be a riposte to an article on dole workers, 'I'm Only Doing My Job!', published in Subversion 22. This piece is so hysterical and generally incoherent that to attempt any systematic response would be almost impossible. What I can do, however, is to explain the situation here in Nottingham and along the way refute the few logical points which the 'Reply' does make. The author(s) identify themselves only as B & B so I will refer to them as Bugs and Bunny, a designation which accurately reflects the level of their contribution.

At its inception Nottingham Campaign Against the Job Seekers Allowance (NCAJSA) contained

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(6) And pack you off to school ("We're rid of him!" "One day he'll thank us!")

Doling it Out

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two distinct tendencies:

(1) A Trades Council and Trade Union tendency with close links to the CPSA. They wanted a CPSA solidarity group with the interests of the claimants being subordinated to those of the CPSA dole workers.

Bugs and Bunny say:

"Our Nottingham friends complain that dole workers don't stick their necks out when claimants are being threatened with dole cuts if they don't look hard enough for work. But it must be remembered that if a dole worker is sacked they too face losing their benefits for six months, and furthermore if they leak information, however trivial, they can be prosecuted under the Official Secrets Act. It is easy being political on the dole. You don't normally get your money cut or get disciplined for handing out leaflets or speaking at meetings; dole workers can."

Actually we have members and reports of claimants being persecuted by dole workers not even for overt political activity, but simply for asking for their rights! The message that comes from Bugs and Bunny is that dole workers are real people whose interests come well before those of the claimants.

Why should claimants worry about it at all if their struggle makes life difficult for dole workers? The fact is that their interests are diametrically opposed. Bugs and Bunny are calling for a dole workers support group rather than a claimants action group. The message coming from the Nottingham CPSA and Trades Council to claimants was, and is, "Don't do anything yourselves, rely on us, we will do it for you". Bugs and Bunny perfectly echo this classic bureaucratic viewpoint.

Think about this further: almost any struggle by any group of workers under capitalism will have negative consequences for other groups of workers. Ban nuclear power: what about the nuclear engineers. Stop producing weapons of mass destruction: what about the interests of the technocrats and scientists. Occupy a dole office: what about the claimants who want their money and the workers who want a quiet life.

The TU/TC tendency are actively opposed to any activity, such as occupying a dole office for example, which would only 'alienate' dole workers. They were actively opposed to any criticism of the Labour Party before and during the General Election period, and indeed anything which might 'rock the boat' for Labour. In fact, they were opposed to any activity which might embarrass the 'broad labour movement' period. In practice, this meant that they were opposed to any activity whatsoever.

(7) Where you're finally broken in

(In Wales, as Stuart Bracewell points out in his 'Dole Bondage: Up Yours!', the bureaucrats and their leftist supporters at least had the political nuance to pretend to want to do some activity as they held a diversionary demonstration.)

In crude material terms of finance and status it is accurate to say that the TU/TC tendency in Nottingham are a relatively privileged layer of the working class and represent the interests of the labour aristocracy.

(2) An Anarchist influenced tendency, along with one Communist (Talbot) and politically non-aligned people, who, for different reasons, do not see the Labour Party or Trade Unions as a means of self-defence for the working class and still less as possible agencies of social change. This tendency consisted of claimants and recent claimants who were, and are, orientated to building links with claimants and direct activity against the JSA. Another factor which formed an undercurrent of antagonism between the tendencies was, and is, the substantial influence of Trotskyism on the Trades Council and CPSA in Nottingham. Habitually concerned, as they are, with Labour Party work, mainly internal 'entrism', it is fair to say, and Talbot is someone who spent ten years in the Trotskyist movement on his way to Communism, that they would regard something like NCAJSA as 'unofficial' and 'ultra-left'. These leftists hate any working class self-activity.

In essence, then, we had in Nottingham an anti-JSA group with a similar social composition as Wales Against the JSA which, probably due to a larger numerical base, the TU and leftist contingent were able to destroy. I will not bore readers with the initial compromises which the 'Anarcho/Commie/non-aligned' tendency made to initiate unity with the TC and CPSA, three leaflets, endless letters, keeping our mouth shut etc., except to point out that the arrest of two comrades after a dole office invasion was something of a watershed. The police were certainly aware that if NCAJSA activists were picked up then the Trades Council would not be protesting and that the CPSA would be having a quiet private laugh.

The end of the Trades Council presence at NCAJSA, which appeared to be a 'keep an eye on the ultras' mission, was the best thing that ever happened to it and enabled the group to genuinely represent the interests of claimants. It is totally wrong to allege, as Bugs and Bunny do, that:

"One should recognise that, for all the bluster our Nottingham friends have provoked, it is action by dole workers which has had the most effect in disrupting the implementation of the JSA and mitigating its effects. With just the one day strike two years ago the dole workers managed to cause more disruption to the implementation of the JSA than the entire Groundswell movement has been able to do in three years."

Leaving aside the timescale, the JSA was introduced on the 7th October 1996, and the fact that the CPSA strike was for screens to protect dole workers against claimants, and nothing to do with opposing the JSA the slur against Groundswell is a simple lie, and a pretty stupid one at that as it is so easy to refute. The CPSA strike had zero effect on the implementation of the JSA and the local CPSA representative in Nottingham had to descend to arguments about the computer system malfunctioning as being the main hope for claimants!

It is clear, if one reads the rules and regulations governing the implementation of the JSA, that it is being imposed in a minimalist manner as management fear a 'blow up'. We know from our activity that the dole management is paranoid about anti-JSA activity and that dole workers are fearful of a three strikes policy. Groundswell has not stopped the JSA, given the balance of class forces at this conjuncture it could never have done so, but it has helped ensure a vast modification in its potential implementation and can take credit for this. To say that direct action against the JSA has been worthless is a slur on the comrades who have struggled against the JSA.

Bugs and Bunny assert that, "part of the job for dole workers is to help people find work as well as to administer the payment of benefits." Before you wet yourself laughing: just two points. Any claimant will tell you that the role of the dole office personnel, far from helping people to find work, is to force claimants into McWork or on to the various ES schemes to keep down the dole figures on paper. This relates to the second point: the role of dole workers now is not simply to 'administer the payment of benefits' but to act in a policing role over claimants. This policing role hangs like a shadow over claimants if there is any attempt to tighten up on the implementation of the JSA. It is this important change in the increase of power of dole workers over claimants which the CPSA and their allies are attempting to gloss over. The best possible deal for claimants has always been when the dole workers are on strike and you get paid automatically without the aggravation of seeing them!

Earlier, Bugs and Bunny make an implicit attempt to minimise the anti-working class activity of dole workers by pointing out that everyone in a capitalist society is in some way implicated in its maintenance and reproduction: "On closer inspection we can find, rather surprisingly, that nearly all workers are in some way working for capital and thus ultimately against the general interests of the working class!" Yes folks, dole workers cannot be criticised because, after all, we're all at it! This is a revelation which I can only thank Bugs and Bunny for bringing to our attention.

If the working class was an homogenous mass then Bugs and Bunny would be accurate, but even a passing glance indicates the utter futility of their 'analysis'. If an analysis cannot distinguish between police, social workers, bailiffs, debt collectors, shop assistants and factory production workers, then, it is a fairly useless analysis. The essential point is that there are degrees of complicity in one's support for capitalism. Even producing a magazine like Subversion, which much as I disagree with some of its politics, is obviously directed to the destruction of this corrupt capitalist system, is going to involve the comrades in 'complicity' as they buy paper, ink and printing technology.

The manner in which we locate workers in terms of class positional location depends on 'objective' factors covering a combination of their relationship to capital, their relationship to the state and their relationship to the working class plus 'subjective' factors such as political class consciousness. It is true that the analysis of this multitude of factors can be complex but even a passing glance indicates some of the possibilities of it.

For example, I think that we can say that, contrary to leftists like the Socialist Workers Party with their 'workers in uniform' thesis which notices that the ranks of the forces are drawn from the working class, that the police and armed forces are direct representatives of the repressive apparatus of the capitalist state.

An obvious difference in the composition of the working class under advanced capitalism, (some would assert an advanced state of decay), is the vast numerical diminishment in those occupying the category of proletarian, i.e., directly producing surplus value in line with the massive decline in manufacturing industry. In contrast, a group which has vastly increased in size is the professional and managerial strata. This grouping are 'between capital and labour' in that, whilst being totally reliant on capitalism for their financial support, they occupy a supervisory role over other working class people - teachers, social workers etc. Many of them have a consciousness of status in which they place themselves above other sectors of the working class.

(8-9) They turn you into consumer durables ("At last they look human!")

I would place dole workers in the lower

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Doling it Out

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echelons of this (PMS) category. They are, if somewhat more indirectly now, state employees who occupy a position of control over a section of the working class. Apologists for dole workers have argued that they are low paid and have low status, but this is irrelevant in defining their policing role. Indeed, many dole workers, precisely because they are aware that they are regarded as expendable by the Benefits Agency, exhibit a very hostile attitude towards their 'clients'. The introduction of 'targeting' for dole workers where they gain favour by removing claimants from the dole, stopping their payments etc. legitimises this.

Of course, as Bugs and Bunny point out, whilst class positional location might allow one to make broad generalisations it does not automatically determine individual consciousness and activity. We noted that workers on a temporary contract at the dole had two main attitudes, do the work on a minimalist basis and get out, or attempt to gain favour from management with one result of this being to give claimants a hard time. In this situation the local anti-JSA group was perfectly correct to attempt to win over individual dole workers who understood the contradictions which their job placed them in with regard to claimants. It is absolutely no criticism of NCAJSA that intensive work failed to locate such people.

The attitude of the local CPSA/TC leadership has been to deny that any contradictions exist and to blame NCAJSA for 'splitting the working class' when it is patently obvious that the class is well split long before we came along. Actually, one important political task is for us, in my opinion, is to politically explain intra-class splits. In the case of the opposition to the JSA, for instance, it quickly became obvious that those forces orientated towards politically supporting the Labour party and trade union perspectives are little more than the left-wing of bourgeois ideology. The article by Bugs and Bunny fits perfectly into this repellent milieu.

Bugs and Bunny are so confident of their arguments that they whine that Subversion should not have published 'I'm Only Doing My Job' at all. Naturally, Subversion can speak for itself on its editorial policy, but have the author(s) of the 'Reply' not heard of the global injunction that signed articles do not necessarily reflect the editorial viewpoint, and may even be in opposition to it order to initiate debate? Of course they must, but so immersed in their decrepit sectarian ghetto are they that open debate is anathema to them. Their whole article reeks of sectarian posturing and sneering.

One thing that the experience of organising against the JSA in Nottingham has indicated is that people of widely diverse political views, and people entirely new to active politics, can work together in a constructive manner and build up a relationship of trust. In an overall political environment where there are painfully few radicals, of any political description, this denotes a tremendously useful experience. Certainly more fruitful than sectarian sniping from the Brighton bunker.

Ted Talbot

(NCAJSA recently changed its name to Nottingham Claimants Action, NCA).

(10) And force you to compete with each other ("At your service, Sir" "Well done teacher")

State Power and Class Solidarity

It is unfortunate that B&B started their Reply with the assumption that the Subversion 22 article "Only Doing Your Job?" was written by anarchists. Actually it wasn't, and as anarchists in the same anti-JSA group as the Two Comrades we will use the opportunity (given to us by Subversion) of seeing the Reply in advance, so as to include a response in the same issue and present another perspective on the dole work issue. We can't start our response without saying that we thought the tone of the Reply was extremely patronising, and also that it is mainly because of their initial ill-informed assumptions that B&B then needed to use such long tortuous logic to present what is really quite a straightforward position. The Two Comrades are left to further explain their own positions if they want to.

Let's look at the attack on anarchism first. B&B bring up the problem of moralism in lifestyle anarchism. There we agree - not supporting miners because they eat meat is lifestylist and moralistic. We would equally criticise primitivists not taking a class struggle perspective. But then we have to suffer accusations of anarchists being bourgeois, liberal and purist, never mind the unfathomable "free-will versus determinism" stuff. Surely you know that all anarchists are not the same? For the record, from our point of view, working class people cannot escape the all-pervading capitalist relation in their everyday lives, whether as wage slaves or dole slaves, or as destitute. However, there are still choices, and these choices don't have to be on moral grounds, but instead on the basis of what is class solidarity and what isn't. It is the rooting of our ideas in class struggle which is important, which has nothing to do with idealism or moralism.

B&B agree with the Two Comrades that the role of the front-line worker has been changed by JSA "from one of administration to more of a policing role", and so do we. But B&B say it hasn't really been accomplished yet so

it's still an arena of struggle, and we should give dole workers the benefit of the doubt, at least the ones who say they are opposing JSA. Well, at a Groundswell conference last year a high-profile dole worker attended, who supports Groundswell and wants other workers to take action against the JSA. We found he believes front line workers shouldn't be criticised for making decisions to send claimants to adjudication. This is even if they know full well that claimants are likely to get cut off the dole to fulfil pre-specified quotas which have been set nationally or locally. Where is the class solidarity there? In case you think that particular dole worker is a bad example, have you really heard anything better from any other? As for action taken by dole workers against performance-related-pay, isn't that more to do with trades union resistance to anything that threatens national pay-bargaining rather than a conscious desire to prevent the unemployed getting shafted by quotas? Furthermore, it doesn't matter if the quotas for getting claimants off the dole are being met only slowly or partially. Even inefficient implementation is no excuse, whether it's due to management incompetence or due to workers taking industrial action, so long as any number of claimants are getting forced off the dole. So we are not comforted by dole workers saying, "don't worry, it's all chaos" in response to introduction of new benefits legislation. As with the introduction of most new computer systems, it took a while for the JSA software bugs to be ironed out and for workers to be trained to use it, but now it seems to be working fine.

(11) Rebellion is badly organised

To make the central point of our reply, the function of a worker's job in relation to the state is as important as its relation to capital. So the singling out of police as beyond the pale on the basis of their "internalising capitalism" is not very helpful. This also goes for the prison officer, and other groups anarchists have traditionally had a problem with, such as the school teacher, the social worker, the psychiatrist and yes, the dole office worker, well before the current rounds of legislation. The anarchist understanding of the importance of power and state power in particular helps us towards an analysis of the role these workers play, no matter that all these groups are wage slaves and many on fairly low pay. The prison officer locks you in your cell, a school teacher disciplines you, the social worker can take your kids away, the psychiatrist can get you sectioned, and the dole worker can take your money away - these are all state related functions, mostly affecting working class people. Of course, just as it is not always easy to define a person's class position in terms of how much they own or earn, it is not always easy to define it by their relationship to the state. It's often a question of degree. Most of us are clear on the police, but we'd say that's not because they are so different, rather because it's so much more obvious that the police aren't there to help us. You say the dole worker is there to help in some capacity. So what? Cops help sometimes - arranging for low paid pensioners' windows to be secured after a burglary for example. If they stuck to that more often would they be a bit better? What about Special Officers, are they a bit nicer? Of course not. Their job function in relation to the state is what matters, not the action of individuals. All we are asking is you consider the role of the dole worker by the same criteria.

It's worth saying here that the pros and cons of "3 Strikes and You're Out" are actually a diversion to our central argument. Three Strikes as it was intended does have some problems, even though it may be useful tactically. It does attempt to individualise each worker's position, singling out the over-zealous types for attention, whereas our argument actually goes further, saying it's not just few rotten apples in the barrel. Secondly, claimants haven't exactly been flocking to us with requests to do it (or to do any other anti-JSA actions for that matter), so it could be seen as vanguardist. Thirdly, 3 Strikes could perhaps be thought of as a means by which class anger is mediated or negotiated by reformists, seeing as dole workers get verbally and physically attacked by claimants on a daily basis anyway!

The link with 3 Strikes and our argument is really only in the response it has had from CPSA and trades unions in general which is basically along the lines of "how dare you attack workers who are just doing their job, just another shitty low paid job under capitalism". It seems to us that the criteria B&B are using is mostly based on economics, and that is why you are soft on this kind of response. It's also what causes you to make the mistake of your "car workers produce cars that kill working class children" analogy. There is no state or power relation here, so it's completely different. Similarly, the postal worker cannot prevent you from being cut off by not delivering the final demand! It's the worker that cuts off another working class person's water that we have a problem with. Notice that this distinction is made not on moral grounds but instead on the power relationship implied. And it is not just the type of job we criticise on the basis of power. Tactics in struggle are also an issue, so ambulance crews not answering emergency calls during a strike which puts working class people's lives at risk are similarly problematic (this was first raised in an old ACF Organise! article, issue 18, which covered the 1989-90 strike).

The Reply's swipe at Subversion's Aims and Principles was on the basis that the view of the Two Comrades acted to divide the working class, so B&B ask why Subversion didn't respond to this. Probably our own view is also seen in the same light. But we are talking about a division which we perceive as already existing in the working class. We would like the dole worker to see the problems in their class position -

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State Power & Class Solidarity

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that of doing a job which especially now by its very nature attacks other working class people. But, in reality, the situation will not be resolved by the claimant and the dole worker coming to a compromise, nor does any really useful solidarity seem likely, and at some point we think revolutionaries will have to accept that. Some on the left who put the police inside the working class would support their 'right' to be unionised, just as they have supported prison officers who until the passing of the Criminal Justice Bill were allowed to be unionised. Even if this is beyond the pale, why not use your argument to make the case for bringing prison officers and prisoners together in struggle? If you don't, that's surely because you have already accepted there can be no compromise short of prisoners being handed the keys. Is the position of the dole worker under JSA really so different?

Useful Work and Useless Toil

Following on the debate in the last two issues of Subversion on *The Targetting of Key Economic Sectors By Troublemaking Types*, we are publishing, below, a letter from a comrade in Liverpool, and, on the opposite page, our reply.

You seem to have run into some internal criticism over your articles (Subversion 21/22) about revolutionaries entering specific kinds of employment. I'd like to suggest actually NOT working offers more of a revolutionary potential than your writer gives credit for. To consider ourselves revolutionary we need to participate in actions that oppose capitalism: it could hardly be said that working for the sake of it is revolutionary. At best work enables us to put something decent on the table to eat and/or helps pay the rent, but the basic ingredient of the act of work surely only underpins the lousy system that enslaves us?

If we are not in a job that pays enough to allow us to financially support the overthrow of capitalism then the job is probably not worth a fuck anyway - give it up, sacrifice the pittance it pays and get down to some REAL work i.e. subverting the system. A regular diet of beans on toast isn't too bad and after a while, when one gets quite used to it, there comes the quiet but wholesome satisfaction knowing that you're no longer following trends of this or that new product that is such an indispensable ploy of capitalist marketing.

Jobs/wages invariably lead us to shackling ourselves to the baubles that capitalism dangles before us incessantly - drop out and do something that hurts capitalism instead of meandering along inside its poxy system. Experience the sheer joy of waking up to a new day, every day, knowing that day to be entirely your own to do with as you like, without having to sell it to anybody. Bliss! Jobs - factories/offices/shops, where jobs are mainly to be found, are simply prisons in which they keep us interred during the prime cycle of the day, releasing us overnight in order to recuperate before returning the following morning for yet another 8/10/12 hours more miserable confinement without seeing the natural light of day, sunshine, blue sky, flowers, pissing-down rain or whatever. It's your life, why spend the best part of it in some factory unit making contributions to the capitalist cause.

(12) Some practice passive resistance ("What!! Failed again!!!" "Parent=cop") (13) Or escape

When I signed on recently (Southport) they tried to push me into a job, wait for it, as, for fuck's sake, a JOB-CLUB LEADER, and hear this too, it was a four-day week, maximum 32 hours, paying £5.70 an hour (rates unheard of advertised on Southport's job display board) plus a yearly quota achievement bonus. Now, I'm on my uppers and have been for a while but no way was I going to take a position that requires me to push some other poor sods into crap employment so that I might prosper a little. No way! At the risk of being sanctioned, perhaps losing entitlement altogether, I managed to talk my way out of it, keeping both my integrity and personal esteem intact. No self-respecting revolutionary could or should entertain a shitty number like that surely?

And all that moralistic lark they come out with about not working equals not contributing to society is just a load of old bollocks too - they only want us working so that they can take more and more taxes from us to finance road schemes, provide revenue via various consumer taxations fostering all manner of environmental degradations that serve only to devalue the quality of life in favour of big business, not forgetting too that wage deductions also are filched to pay for the elite lifestyles our rulers lord it over us with. NOT working could become as positive as not voting; if none, or enough of us don't do it, then surely we will have them worried?

In conclusion, allow me to refer back to my own situation briefly: I've been signing on (dole? benefit? why use terms that suggest they are giving us something we should be grateful for?) for almost two years now and I know that a compulsory work-scheme

is imminent. Contemptible of such a scheme though I will be, I will be taking just one line of thought into any forced labour projects with me: Sabotage - photocopiers, computers, vehicles, machinery etc., all cost employers thousands of pounds to buy, to maintain, to repair. Let us make certain that anyone who participates in these wank work-schemes as an employer or training provider pays very dearly for collaboration with the government...Welfare to work? Bollocks! Farewell to work!
F (Liverpool)

Subversion Reply

Just as it is a mistake to believe that wearing black is a revolutionary act, so it is a mistake to believe that not having a job or having a job is a revolutionary act. Oh, if only life were so simple that I could believe I was in any way bucking the system by not having a job as you seem to believe...

Unfortunately, unemployment is a key factor in the operation of the economy. The fact that so many people in Britain are unemployed has enabled business to keep wages down and to instil a discipline and fear in the workforce that was not there in the 1970's. The "recovery" that we have been witness to in the British economy over the last 10 or so years has been due to the way our rulers have tackled the labour problem. It has become a great situation for our economic and political bosses, not only have large numbers of unemployed helped keep the economy on track, but they are also able to make the unemployed feel guilty for not having a job, and, as you point out, make the employed look upon the unemployed as a bunch of idle scroungers who are just bringing our glorious country down. Being unemployed is not a threat to the system. Now, the bosses would certainly like militant troublemaking workers to become unemployed, so that they are no threat to the motor of capitalism (i.e. profit-making, production, and all the jobs that help the economy to run smoothly).

So please explain just how being unemployed "hurts capitalism", and what is it that you do all day that a worker can't do for the promotion of radical thought amongst the working class? (My experience of unemployed radicals, apart from a few notable exceptions, is that they generally somehow seem to have less time or inclination to do and produce things than those who work!).

You seem not to have read the original article properly. Where does it promote "working for the sake of it"? Are you saying that it is worth doing a job only if it "allows us to financially support the overthrow of capitalism"? Does it matter what sort of job this might be? Should we all train to be managers or professionals so that we can get good wages, or become rich tycoons?? If, on the other hand, we go unemployed you say we will be able to get down to "some real work i.e. subverting the system" (see above; please explain). And where does this leave all the militant workers we continually hear about across the world? Aren't they good enough for you? Where does stopping work en masse, and thereby halting the wheels of capitalism, come on your list of most revolutionary things to do? Pretty low down I suppose.

(14) But the tyrants always have the upper hand ("Are you still a virgin?!" "What will the neighbours think!")

We all, of course, agree that work is a horrible thing, and the whole point of class struggle is to do away with work (i.e. our slavery), which is why the article in question was trying to put forward ideas on how we might best achieve a greater level of class struggle. It was an appeal to everyone to think about how to put themselves in the most interesting position regarding class struggle.

As for your lucrative job offer. Are you sure you actually even read the title of the original article? The article was talking about getting jobs in workplaces where there is an ongoing history of trouble, not taking supervisory posts in back-to-work schemes!!

I'm glad that, should you be forced into a work-scheme in the near future, you will be acting like a lot of workers (who sabotage, steal things and time, etc.). I'm sure, also, that you are aware of the gulf between brave words of intention to sabotage and the actual practice on the job. Also, I'm worried that you only seem to reserve your hatred for the bosses who "collaborate (...) with the government", should we only work for employers who support the Tories?

On not voting in democratic elections. Unfortunately, although it is certainly worthwhile pointing out to our class that voting changes nothing, it is extremely doubtful that the low turn-out at elections worries our rulers. In the USA barely 50% of the electors bother voting, this makes no impact on the democratic process. Don't think that our rulers are stupid, they also know that voting changes nothing, politics is a circus for our entertainment, the real decision-making goes on out of sight of us sad proletarians. If there was any concern that people weren't taking an interest in the democratic process then they could always introduce a law like they have in Australia, where you are legally obliged to vote. But it still wouldn't mean anything; 2% or 100%: it still wouldn't change anything. So, no, a few more of us going on the dole isn't going to worry "them" any more than a few extra thousand not voting at election times.

It is a nice idea that maybe everyone

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Useful Work and Useless Toil

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individually will just give up work to go and lie in a field, but it's a bit unlikely isn't it? Capitalism only finds itself under threat when its workers stop working and profit-making is prevented, this will only happen when the actual employees halt the production/profit process. This is happening every day around the world, if we really want communism then we have to understand that it is from these real actions (not day-dreams) that the revolution will be born.

(15) Because the majority capitulate and collaborate ("OK, you're hired")

Who Can Afford To Pay The Cost of a Communist Utopia?

We are publishing here a letter held over for lack of space from the last issue of Subversion. It refers to three pieces in Subversion 21: "Green Communism", "For those of you thinking about getting a job...", and a letter about "the JSA and all that". Starting opposite, we respond to some of the points it makes.

The Green Communism article rightly stresses that science and technology are not some sort of independent force unrelated to the interests of classes and individuals in present society. This is the mistake technophobes such as Green Anarchist (who regard science and technology much as the medieval church regarded witchcraft) and some 'revolutionary' groups (who imagine that a communist society could extend all the trappings of consumerism to the entire world) are all prone to fall into.

If the writer is correct that "it is just not conceivable that a communist society could base its transport on the mass use of individual motor cars" then this has important implications for the strategy and even the feasibility of a revolutionary movement in the 'developed' world.

In the UK there are some 20 million private cars, or roughly 2 to every 5 people. To reach this level of car ownership for the entire world would mean roughly quadrupling the present car 'population' (and roads and all the associated infrastructure). This is just not on under any economic system. Even if the resources were available the eco-system could never handle the resulting pollution.

This means that in the 'developed' world revolutionaries have a problem that few seem willing to face up to. The price of a communist utopia is, among other things, giving up the private car. Frankly, I can't see many car addicts being willing to pay this price. Since they and their dependents form a majority in the rich nations, this alone seems a massive obstacle to revolutionary movements in these countries. If we're going to be honest with the punters let's throw in the fact that they'll be lucky to have meat more than once a week and a foreign holiday once a decade or a life-time.

We are getting into the murky area of who is middle class and who is working class. What causes endless confusion here is the insistence that someone's class label be defined by their relationship to the means of production, i.e. what sort of job they do, if any. Most 'revolutionaries' think that anyone who is not in some kind of authority over others is part of the working class and hence potential revolutionary material. This leads some to feel that a landless third world peasant has the same class interests as a highly paid technician or salesman in the rich world. People work to live, not live to work. What matters to people themselves is their relationship to the means of consumption i.e. how much money they can get hold of. Anyone with a material standard of living which could not be extended to the whole of humanity under any circumstances is best defined as middle class, if they are not actually capitalists or powerful politicians.

This focus on consumption makes much more sense of the world as it actually is than the writer in no.21 who imagines that there are "key" sections of the "working class" able to "hold the country to ransom" and that revolutionaries can pick and choose their jobs so that they might concentrate in these sectors. Speaking as one of P's "unemployed proletarians", I would be only too happy to take a "cushy, well-paid, middle class job" if such were available to me, rather than "idling comfortably" on JSA at £47.90.

In fact the idea of the working class in countries like the UK is a delusion. Most people in the 'developed' world are middle class. Materially privileged compared to the impoverished majority of humanity, they have a vested interest in preserving the system that delivers these privileges (while they last anyway).

But there is a large, expanding 'underclass' (long-term unemployed, low-paid, most pensioners, single parents etc.) who have no material stake in the system. Our interest is in extracting as much as possible from the rest of society. Yes, they do owe us a living, because they debar us, by various means, from making our own.

Unlike the 'powerful sectors' (who seem to have had a run of hard luck recently) we have little or no labour to withdraw so we must find other methods of struggle which cannot be discussed here for obvious reasons.

Many will feel that this analysis is pessimistic, 'counter-revolutionary', 'capitalist propaganda' etc. It may be all those things but if we look at the real world, from the attitudes and actions of the people we know to the world-wide political scene and recent history, it explains the fact that no revolutionary movement has achieved anything like a mass following in recent years in the rich nations, and will at least help to avoid idiocies like believing that a JSA claimant can have a common class interest with their middle class interrogator on £11-14,000 a year (plus bonuses for stopping giros).

In conclusion I think that any effective revolutionary movement in the 'developed' world must forget this fantasy of the 'working class' and concentrate on working with the 'underclass', whose grievances can only be addressed at the expense of the middle class, pro-capitalist majority. This is why struggles like anti-JSA are important.

JW (London)

Reply:

Revolutionary Potential of the Working Class in the "Developed" World

JW's basic thesis seems to be that in global terms, the bulk of the working class in the 'developed world' are wedded to the capitalist system by reason of their relatively high level of consumption of commodities compared with the impoverished majority of humanity, as a result of which they will never make a revolution.

In response we would make the following points.

1. Whilst the disparities in the geographical distribution of access to the basic requirements of a healthy and fulfilling life is undoubtedly a major problem which any new society would have to tackle as a priority, in a conscious and planned way, such disparities on their own cannot explain the way in which struggle against the present system develops and the possibilities for its overthrow.

2. JW doesn't write off everyone in the developed world. Some, the long term unemployed, many pensioners, single parents and the low paid (how low?) apparently have NO stake in the system even though their material conditions of life are probably still much better than millions of others, waged and unwaged, elsewhere in the world. JW has a problem seeing better-off workers in this country as even potential allies, but many an impoverished 'landless peasant' elsewhere in the world might find it difficult to see JW as a potential ally on this basis!

3. JW doesn't define the boundaries of the 'developed' world. It would presumably include Europe (East as well as West?), North America, Japan, Australasia. Then what about the South-East Asian rim, parts of South America, South Africa and the Middle East etc? It begins to appear that, to the extent that there is a division between developed and underdeveloped, this is certainly not on the basis of national boundaries, of "rich versus poor nations". The workers JW is writing off may not be the majority but they are a significant, widely spread, and potentially powerful minority. If they really are all going to be against revolutionary change for all time , then frankly revolution WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE!

4.

It is almost certainly the case that most 'privileged' and better-off sections of the working class are not going to be at the FOREFRONT of any militant collective action or revolutionary change. Equally there is strong evidence that the really impoverished (starving tribespeople in Zaire for instance?) are also unlikely to be at the forefront of any radical or revolutionary change, if only because their desperation prevents ANY possibility of organisation or awareness beyond the next meal.

5. In so far as levels of income and consumption are any guide to the likelihood of people engaging in struggle today, it is the relative levels locally which are likely to be most significant, for instance between the unwaged and low waged, high waged, and the rich. In practice however it would be difficult to find any direct correlation between levels of struggle and position in the hierarchy of income and consumption.

6. No worker, whether high or low paid, has material security in this system. Workers at all levels have come under attack and have fought back against redundancies, wage cuts, speed-ups, extension of hours, cuts in working conditions etc, and have often found common cause with each other in the process, a common cause which increasingly spans national frontiers.

7. Capitalism certainly tries to reduce life to the consumption of commodities,

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(16) And end up supporting them ("Just like his old man!" "Now it's my turn...")

Revolutionary Potential of the Working Class in the "Developed" World

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to reduce us to individual consumers rather than whole human beings. Outside of consumption, to the extent that capitalism acknowledges civil society at all, we are treated as individual citizens and voters, or 'partners' in the economy.

It may sometimes seem that we have all fallen for this and that our highest aspiration is a bigger and better house and a bigger and better car. Aside from the fact that capitalism, as we said earlier, cannot actually guarantee this continual access to ever increasing personal consumption, it seems to us that many people are deeply unhappy with the whole thing under the surface and cannot in fact be satisfied with a life of endless consumption. There is in the end a big difference between "quality of life" and "standard of living" in the capitalist sense.

This dissatisfaction often expresses itself in negative ways: the huge interest in re-invented and re-packaged religions for instance, everything from Islam and Buddhism to born again Christianity and the mysticism of sections of the Green movement; the desire for community and connection to 'real life' through the short cut of drugs - LSD in the 60s and 70s or ecstasy to-day; the continuing contradictory appeal of nationalism or racism in a search for some kind of communal identity not subject to the changing needs of the market.

All of these expressions are in the end fruitless in so far as they only reinforce the real material sources of alienation in the world, but they still bear witness to the refusal of human beings to be reduced to mere consumers.

8. The 'normal' everyday life of capitalism sees workers divided and isolated not only by their varying degrees of income and ability to consume, but also by a hierarchy of power often interrelated to other divisions based on differences of race, sex, culture etc.

As a result individual behaviour is often contradictory. The car owner you refer to for instance may at different times be opposed to motorway extensions because they are a lover of the countryside, support public transport because other members of their family need it, and argue for traffic safety measures which restrict car use because they have kids who are vulnerable, but in the immediate situation are unlikely to get rid of their car.

It is only in the PROCESS of an expanding collective resistance to the system that SOME of these divisions can be overcome and the contradictions in individual behaviour and between individual and collective behaviour be resolved.

9. Collective resistance can only work if it is grounded in the real interests of those involved. Since it starts in a piece-meal fashion from different sectors of workers with different IMMEDIATE interests, the starting point will rarely provide an immediate basis of unity with others.

So for instance, opposition to the JSA by unemployed workers will often initially be in conflict with workers in the Employment Service. In this situation abstract appeals for unity are at best futile and at worst could disarm the organisation of the unemployed. It is a fact however that ES workers along with other employed workers have an interest in seeing unemployment neutralised as a force for lowering wages and conditions (quite apart from the fact that they could all be unemployed themselves at sometime or another). So at another level there is a common interest between employed and unemployed.

Achieving a PRACTICAL unity in the light of this is inevitably a contradictory process, which involves developing and changing the balance of power between different sections of our class and creating new material situations in the course of struggle which make it both desirable and possible for those involved to join together.

The recent dispute involving Liverpool dockers - a formerly well-paid section of our class, but not through the function of their work exercising any particular power over other workers as compared with some relatively low paid ES workers! - shows on a very small scale how things can change in the course of struggle.

Firstly it is worthy of note how older dockers steadfastly refused for over two years increasing offers of redundancy payments and pensions, so highly did they value the feelings of solidarity and community of their fellow dockers and the wider working class and so committed were they to the future of younger workers. Payments that would have secured for many, their remaining lives in terms of

home, car and holidays abroad!

Secondly, we have witnessed a growing mutual support between the dockers and other workers in struggle - most notably the very low paid, mostly Asian women workers at Hillingdon hospital, Turkish workers here and abroad, Magnet workers, and anti-motorway and anti-runway campaigners, amongst others.

10. Civilisation - that is class society in all its present and past forms – has always been divided into rich and poor, with vast disparities geographically in levels of wealth. Trying to define class in terms of income and consumption tells us nothing about how today's modern capitalist society operates as compared with previous tribal, slave, feudal, Asiatic, mercantile or other forms of society. It provides no clues as to how and why certain sections of workers and not others engage in collective struggle against the system at particular junctions in time.

Periodically, throughout the history of capitalism workers have, on both a small and large scale, joined together in common struggle irrespective of their differing levels of income or consumption. At high points of struggle, workers - employed and unemployed and from all walks of life - have found common cause against the capitalist economy and state. Underlying the variety of forms of struggle has been our common experience of exploitation and alienation through wage labour and commodity production.

In the long term this experience provides a basis for unified action internationally against the system as a whole. In the shorter term it is the progress of the struggle itself and the shifting balance of power which will define which side people are on at any given time. Our experience suggests that relative income and consumption levels will not be the most important factor in this determination.

BOOK REVIEWS

Work, Marx's Critique, and Demand-Led Strikes: Two Recent Publications From India

A BALLAD AGAINST WORK (62 pages)
REFLECTIONS ON MARX'S CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY (45 pages)
Both published in 1997 and available free from Collectivities c/o Majdoor Library, Autopin Jhuggi, N.I.T., Faridabad 121001, India,
or on the internet at
http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/2379

We have no hesitation in recommending *A Ballad Against Work* as a well written, easy to read expose of the realities of life for us wage slaves whether living in Europe or India, a reality hidden behind the ideologies and mystification daily pumped out by governments, media, trade unions, and religious authorities everywhere. The pamphlet explains the real life extension of the working day/year for millions of workers despite the official reduction of working hours proclaimed by legislation and trade union agreements. On top of this most workers have suffered a major intensification of work. These two aspects of wage labour have had appalling results for our physical and mental well-being that are amply illustrated in the pamphlet with facts, figures and individual examples. Management strategies (by business, the state and trade unions) to screw us in various ways are explained and illustrated along with some interesting and occasionally novel ways in which groups of workers have sought to fight back.

This pamphlet is an invaluable addition to all revolutionaries' agitation and educational armoury.

Reflections on Marx's Critique of Political Economy explains a number of basic and still valid Marxist propositions. Despite assurances to the contrary I think some prior understanding of Marx's economic analysis IS necessary for the reader to properly evaluate the author's criticism of the historical limitations of Marx's analysis and the faults in subsequent Marxist and Marxist-Leninist analysis. Clearly there are both contradictions and historical limitations in the works of Marx, but as the very publication of this pamphlet in 1997 shows, there is no better starting point for understanding the functioning of the capitalist economy.

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Work, Marx's Critique and Demand-Led Strikes

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The author is critical of Marx's concentration of his economic analysis on capitalism in its pure abstracted state rather than as it exists in the real world in relation to pre-capitalist economies. Personally I always thought that, correctly interpreted, this approach strengthened the opposition of genuine revolutionaries to capitalism as such and not just to capitalism in its various backward or undeveloped forms. It is nonetheless true that Marx's comments on some of the particular historic forms of capitalist ownership in his time and his thoughts on where the changes he observed might lead can provide, and were certainly used by some to provide, a Marxist justification for subsequent leftist support for state capitalism. There is equally much else in what both Marx and Engels wrote to support opposition to all forms of state capitalism.

The historical and continuing role of the state in the economy is well explained and the author does a good demolition job on the economic absurdities underpinning leftist theories of monopoly capitalism and imperialism.

The author rightly stresses the historical distinctiveness of mercantile and usurers "capital" and the continuing importance of simple commodity production to modern capitalism. Whether or not capitalism could in practice exist purely on its own basis without substantial areas of non-capitalist and simple commodity production I'm not sure. It is certainly true that purely capitalist relations are continuing to expand both socially and geographically, producing major problems in the process.

Despite some minor reservations I think this pamphlet is worth reading.

Lastly I would like to comment on an issue only briefly alluded to in ***A Ballad Against Work***, but developed more in correspondence with the author. In the ***Ballad*** the author states:

"Lockouts by bureaucrats and strikes by representatives involve direct intimidation of workers. Dismissals and physical attacks are what wage workers bear during both lockout and strike, and from representatives and bureaucrats."

The author reinforces this view in correspondence as follows:

"What is known and propagated as struggles of wage-workers are unified, centralised, unifocal struggles on the basis of factory, branch or region around a charter of demands. We have participated in some of these kinds of struggles and are acquainted with many covering a period of twenty years. We have come to realise that these are pre-meditated traps laid down by managements, unions and state apparatuses to implement policies of work-intensification, retrenchment, wage-cut and degrading working conditions. These struggles are in fact struggles of managements, unions and state-apparatuses against wage-workers because:

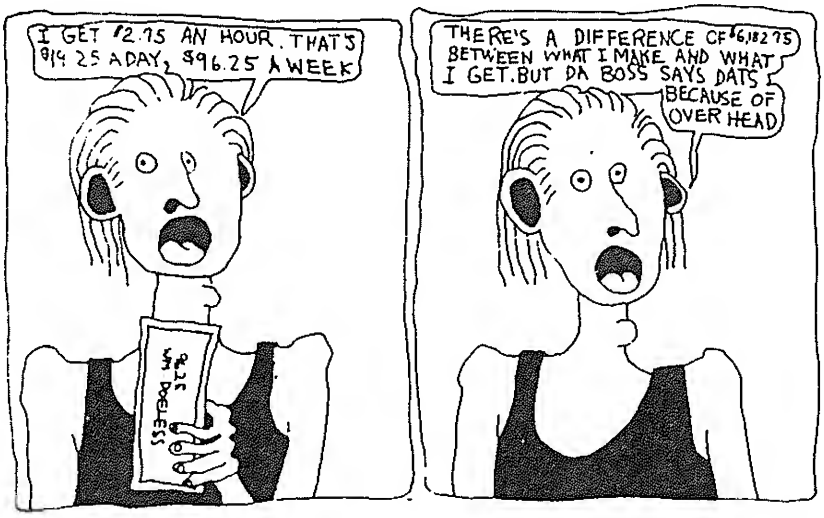
- control of wage-workers through representation and delegation is ensured
- imposing of the deceptive power of the negotiating table
- provides focused target for repressive apparatuses
- demands of unity ensure that different opinions are erased and voices of dissent are muzzled
- insulation and isolation from wage-workers of other factories, branches and regions ensured and
- dispersion of wage-workers is facilitated."

The author goes on to illustrate the above with a number of convincing examples from India and tentatively suggests that the long running Liverpool dockers dispute also illustrates the same points. I could also add some examples of my own from the European experience but this still leaves some unresolved problems.

The author is right in what he says about the typical traditional demand-led strike of the unions and also right to emphasise the importance of many small, and not so small, everyday struggles of workers that take place outside and often against the unions, in undermining capitalist authority. It must certainly be part of the work of revolutionary groups to report, discuss and popularise such activities.

I think in the above process the author has perhaps 'thrown the baby out with the bathwater'. If our class is to move from resistance to capitalist attacks towards the overthrow of capitalism then at some stage we must move to more open, direct, large scale co-ordinated actions. Strikes and occupations involving the imposition of class needs must surely be part of this process? In practice workers' own

"demands" as opposed to those of the unions and political parties are likely to arise in the early stages of such actions. A move from the psychology of "demands" to a psychology of direct imposition of needs seems unlikely to take place in one fell swoop. In this process there are certainly some serious dangers of representation and hierarchy emerging but they cannot be avoided by simply refusing to countenance open organisation and confrontation with the system.



Even in the immediate situation I do not think it is beyond the ingenuity of workers, starting from an official strike or a lockout to extend and subvert the purposes and control of the union bosses and employers. There are numerous cases, including the Liverpool dockers dispute, where this has happened in at least a small way. The Liverpool dockers are aware that they were manoeuvred into a dispute and then a lockout by the employers. How they might have responded better than they did has been the subject of much discussion. An immediate occupation right at the start was actually proposed by some and would certainly have created an early impact though as we all know there are other potential problems with this tactic. Possibly they could have crossed the initial picket line and engaged in other forms of passive resistance and sabotage but who is to say that a lockout could still not have been imposed later? It is a complex situation and at the end of the day victory depends on wider support and hitting the employers where it hurts i.e. in their pockets.

☆

More discussion of these ideas can be found in ***Collective Action Notes*** no. 13 available from the Subversion address - send a large s.a.e. ***A Ballad Against Work*** is also available from ***Subversion*** or ***Collective Action Notes*** - for the ***CAN*** address see page 19.

Trade Unions and the Capitalist Left

In this reply to a regular correspondent we explain in greater detail two of the points in our statement of "What We Stand For" (see page 1): our attitude towards trade unions, and our opposition to the political organisations of capitalism's Left wing.

Basically we think that in the conditions of modern day capitalism a serious attack on our class can only be resisted by going "outside and against" the unions. Certainly an offensive against the system and the possibility of revolution emerging from this would not be possible within the framework of the trade unions (or any other union form).

How this has happened to some extent in the past and might happen again in the future is however a practical question. It is not achieved by small revolutionary groups, still less individuals, taking up moral positions towards existing unions and their activities. What we do as revolutionaries is guided by our historical understanding of the role of unions, but it depends on the particular situation we are addressing.

It can vary most obviously according to the general level and intensity of class struggle in the local and world context. It could also vary to some extent depending on the nature of a particular struggle, the unions involved, the workplace and the local history of struggle and local culture.

We have to judge what we do in terms of how it will help (if at all?) move the class struggle forward and increase the confidence, solidarity and autonomy of our class.

For Subversion then - a small group operating in Britain in 1998 - we do not oppose individual membership of trade unions. Generally speaking we do oppose taking up official positions (even unpaid ones), but some members have occasionally in the past temporarily become shop stewards where they thought, on balance, this was useful to advance a particular dispute (mainly because this was the easiest way to get meetings organised in a situation where the level of struggle was low).

The point of this long preamble is to stress that the above position isn't so much a matter of principle as of practice and tactics. We can imagine, for instance that in a country with a totalitarian political regime and compulsory membership of a government union that individual revolutionaries would belong to that union out of necessity. On the other hand in some countries now (e.g.

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Trade Unions and the Capitalist Left

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France and Italy) where union membership is low and divided between numerous different political and religiously affiliated unions, but where there is a history of independent struggle against both unionised and non-unionised workers, revolutionaries might refuse to join any union. The point is to move struggle beyond the framework of the unions and unionism in whatever practical way we can. Hope that's clear?

On your second question about the "capitalist left"...Capitalism involves the domination of society by commodity production (the market, buying and selling, money, etc.) based on the extraction of surplus value by a minority which owns and controls (either directly or indirectly) the means of production and distribution.

That said, there are many ways of organising and managing capitalism from individual ownership, through partnerships, joint stock companies, trusts, local and national state enterprises, multinational companies and co-operatives, etc. There are also various forms of political organisation of the state depending on historical development and local conditions. Revolutionaries oppose capitalism whatever form it takes.

Generally the "left" has favoured various forms of state ownership and control sometimes in association with 'co-operative' ventures. They have not opposed - in practice - commodity production, wage labour and the state. More often than not in times of intense class struggle the 'left' has proved itself to be the saviour of capitalism not its gravedigger and this despite the "good" intentions of some individuals within it! Similarly some anarchists whilst opposing the "state" (at least in theory) still promote a form of decentralised market economy - they are really just radical liberals not revolutionaries.

For all these reasons revolutionaries refuse to join "fronts" with organisations of the capitalist left. This doesn't of course mean that we can't work with individual 'leftists' in various practical ways for limited objectives - as we have for instance in anti-JSA groups, dockers support groups, some environmental groups etc. and in particular workplace or other struggles.

Important notice: Publication of the final frame of this strip does not indicate any intention to dismiss critics of capitalism as insane, nor any agreement with dominant notions of so-called "mental illness".

GANDALF 3

The "GANDALF 3" - Saxon Wood, Noel Molland and Steve Booth - were sentenced to 3 years in prison under the conspiracy laws after being found guilty of inciting "persons unknown" by publishing news of environmental and animal rights direct actions in *Green Anarchist* (GA) and the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) supporters' newsletter. While we are opposed to the politics of Green Anarchist and the ALF, we extend our solidarity to these targets of state repression which could just as easily have been aimed elsewhere.

On 27 March the Gandalf 3 were released after four and a half months in jail, pending an appeal against their convictions, on a date to be arranged. Meanwhile the trial on the same charges of Robin Webb, with possibly Paul Rogers, is going ahead, starting on 27 April at Portsmouth Crown Court. (At a pre-trial hearing on 14 April it will be decided whether they will be tried together or separately).

Up-to-date news about all of this, and information about meetings and events organised in support of the various defendants, can be obtained from the London Gandalf Support Campaign c/o London Greenpeace, Panther House, 38 Mount Pleasant, London WC1X 0AP (email care of lgp@envirolink.org) or on the internet at www.cbuzz.co.uk/SchNEWS.

The Dead-End of 'Charter' Politics

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wages system, antagonistic division of society between bosses and workers etc. will be maintained. This is especially true of points 2 ("The right to join a trade union..."), 3 ("The right to work...") and 5 ("Defence of the Welfare State...").

Accompanying this economic programme are other demands amounting to the sort of democratic modernisation of the political apparatus long promoted by liberal and leftist supporters of the system e.g. "Equal rights for all", "The right of citizenship within a democracy", and so on. The implementation of these measures would serve no other purpose than to shore up the system and further integrate workers as atomised individual citizens into the system that exploits and oppresses us.

Completing the line-up are a few points thrown in reflecting links with Reclaim the Streets activists, plus other old favourites like nuclear disarmament and British troops out of Ireland. In short, there's at least something here for everyone.

This long leftist shopping list is expressed entirely in the language of "human rights". "Demands" appearing to assert "rights" and "freedoms" which are supposed to already exist (or which it is believed ought to exist) become in practice an appeal to the ruling class and its state to provide these things, as can be seen for example in the number of points in the Charter which require the repeal or reversal of current legislation and policy. Perhaps this is why the Charter calls for "Abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords" but not abolition of the House of Commons - presumably MPs will still be needed to pass all the necessary legislation.

Nowhere is there any recognition of the fact that in class-divided capitalist society we have no inalienable "rights" as "humans", and that the only "rights", "freedoms" etc workers "enjoy" are those which at any particular time we as a class are powerful enough to assert and maintain. Some of the measures "demanded" in the Charter would only be possible if workers were already strong enough and militant enough to impose them anyway. An example is point 10 which demands: "The right of workers to organise internationally to resist injustice and oppression, to reclaim the planet and put an end to war". If workers were strong enough to achieve these objectives wouldn't we just be going right ahead and doing it? The idea that the "right" to do it has to be "demanded" is simply a measure of our weakness.

To sum up, the Charter approach is a huge diversion away from the task of class organisation and promotion of united struggle and direct action in our own interests, into support for reform and modernisation of capitalism. It may well reflect the political aspirations of dockers stewards or left-wing groups influential in their support, but it is not an expression of independent class struggle or the need to overthrow capitalism.

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RECOMMENDED READING

If you like Subversion, you could also check out:

Organise! Journal of the Anarchist Communist Federation, and *Resistance*, new bi-monthly agitational news-sheet, from ACF c/o 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

Wildcat Write to: BM Cat, London WC1N 3XX (don't mention Wildcat on the envelope)

Aufheben c/o Prior House, Tilbury Place, Brighton BN2 2GY.

Collective Action Notes POB 22962, Balto., MD 21203, USA.

SUBVERSION WEB SITE

If you have access to the internet, check out the Subversion web site! There you'll find back issues of *Subversion* (nos. 12 and 17-22), copies of *The Best of Subversion* and *Second Best of Subversion*, and our two pamphlets, *Labouring in Vain: Why Labour is not a Socialist Party* and *Ireland: Nationalism and Imperialism: The Myths Exploded.*

Publications by other groups include Year Minus One Press's *A Day in The Life of The Car* (1989), three old Wildcat pamphlets - *Capitalism and Its Revolutionary Destruction* (1984), *How Socialist is the SWP?* (1985) and *Class War on the Home Front: Revolutionary Opposition to WWII* (1986) - along with the present-day Wildcat group's *Unmasking the Zapatistas.*

Key texts from the history of the workers' movement include Sylvia Pankhurst & Anton Pannekoek's *Communism versus Reforms* (1974 Workers' Voice reprint), and four items related to the German Revolution (1918-23): *The Origins of the Movement for Workers' Councils in Germany*; *The Wilhelmshaven Revolt*; *Introduction to 'Left Communism' in Germany 1914-23*; and *Summary of Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution* (GIK, 1931). On the same theme, there are memoirs by Jan Appel and Otto Ruhle.

Besides all this there is a list of other web sites you'll probably be interested in if you like Subversion.The web site address is

http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/8195

You can email us from the web site, or via this address

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The Dead-End of 'Charter' Politics

Why the "People's' Charter" is not the sort of extension of the struggle that the Liverpool dockers really needed

One of the art forms created by surrealist artists such as Marcel Duchamp was the 'cabinet of curiosities'. These were random collections of objects which left the viewer to try to figure out their inter-relationship and overall meaning. The "People's Charter for Social Justice", launched originally by the Merseyside Port Shop Stewards Committee, is a similar sort of strange mixture of elements.

Draft and revised versions of the Charter have appeared in issues of the Dockers' Charter newspaper published by the Liverpool Dock Shop Stewards Committee. The Charter is a reflection of the desire on the part of many Liverpool dockers and their supporters to see the development of a wider movement of opposition to the present attacks on our class. This ambition has been left unfulfilled because of the absence of any widespread upsurge of class struggle in Britain while the dockers' struggle was taking place. In its place the dockers and their supporters have fallen back on the traditional campaign-type politics of 'the left', and it is this which is encapsulated in the Charter.

The Charter is thus an expression of one of the weaknesses of the Liverpool dockers' struggle rather than any of its strengths. Although the locked-out Merseyside dockers were unable to impose their demand for full reinstatement of the sacked Mersey Docks workers, they have shown amazing and inspiring courage, solidarity and determination in their struggle. Unable to draw in other dockers in Britain already subjected to wholesale casualisation, they travelled the world to gain international support, established their own 'Women of the Waterfront' women's support group, forged links with strikers in other parts of the country, and found common cause with environmental activists struggling against capitalism's expansion of the motorways and incursions into our public and social space. Faced with the hostility and obstruction of the national apparatus of the Transport & General Workers' Union they went directly to other workers whenever possible, using the official union machinery where they had to or by-passing it where necessary and if possible.

If the struggle didn't go beyond the limits of trade unionism this says more about the lack of resonance in the wider class struggle than it does about the dockers' own efforts. In general the links made were directly with other workers in struggle and were based on straightforward solidarity and mutual aid. Most of these industrial struggles like those by Magnet Kitchens and Hillingdon hospital workers have been relatively small-scale and isolated. There hasn't been a large group of workers in struggle in Britain where a genuine unified and joint action could have been made possible.

Not a lot to do with the dockers' charter but a terrific picture nonetheless.

The "People's Charter for Social Justice" is a less than poor parody of the sort of extension of their struggle which the dockers really needed. It is an at times incoherent and self-contradictory mish-mash of "demands". Basically the political programme underlying the Charter is clapped-out 'Old Labour' welfarist state capitalism. The Charter has been criticised for not making it clear that "All the major social injustices are caused by capitalism" and that "we are not able to fully achieve the demands of the People's Charter within the present system" (letter from a London Support Group member, Dockers Charter no.16, June 1997). In fact no going beyond capitalism seems to be envisaged and most of the "demands" implicitly accept that the

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